



Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission System of Natural Areas

Natural Area Fact Sheet

Searles Prairie Natural Area

County: Benton

Size (acres): 10

Summary: A remnant of the area's original Osage Prairie, Searles prairie displays a high diversity of plant species that reflects the careful management it has received. Pimple mounds and a natural seep on the tract support plant species adapted to divergent moisture regimes.

Driving Directions: From Interstate 540 in Rogers take Highway 102 east approximately 2 miles. The prairie is located in the northwest quadrant of the intersection of Dixieland Road and Highway 102 in Rogers, Arkansas.

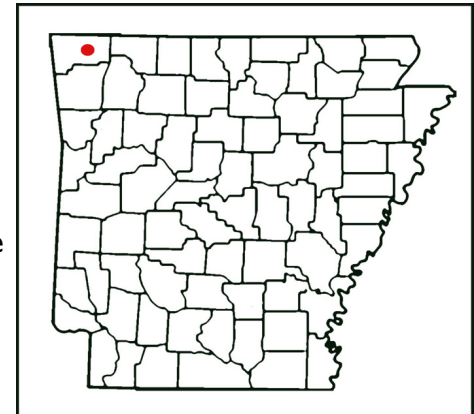


Detailed Site Description: Searles Prairie is a ten-acre remnant of tallgrass prairie. It represents the original Osage Prairie on the Springfield Plateau west of the White River/Illinois Divide.

Searles Prairie, like the rest of Benton County prairies, is a low loamy prairie that probably owes its existence to a shallow fragi-pan of impervious clay that results in extremes of water relations and gives grasses a competitive advantage over trees. The soils are Jay silt loam and Cherokee silt loam which are characterized by layers of moderately well drained silt loam, to somewhat poorly drained silt loam, silty clay loam, and clay. This prairie remains wet for long periods of time after rains due to the clay and poor drainage.

Prairie Mounds are scattered throughout the natural area on the Jay and Cherokee soil types. These are small hummocks 5' – 15' in diameter and 1' – 4' high. The mounds are believed to have been formed by wind blown material during glacial times or later. The soil texture on the mounds is coarser than the surrounding soils and the soils under the mounds are the same as the soil surrounding the mounds.

Plant species such as big bluestem, little bluestem, Indiangrass, prairie cordgrass, switchgrass, gayfeather, perennial legumes, numerous forbs, and other perennials are indicative of prairie conditions on this association. Indicative of poor conditions are the presence of broomsedge bluestem, splitbeard bluestem, ragweed, and woody species such as persimmon, sassafras, and sumac, the presence of which is due to human-related activity.



System of Natural Areas

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Detailed Description cont.,

The general characteristics of the prairie communities are:

Tallgrass Prairie – Prairies are open grasslands with scattered shrubs and trees, often exhibiting a gradation in community type related to soil moisture and droughtiness. Searles Prairie exhibits a significant shift in species composition with a gradual transition from dry (little bluestem) to mesic (big bluestem) to hydric species (switchgrass and buttonbush).

Decades of mowing for hay, fire suppression, and poor drainage contribute to the present condition of Searles Prairie. Native grasses are reduced in comparison to forbs and other shrubs. Many invasive grass species are present here, including fescue, ryegrass, velvet grass, and a brome grass. Additionally, species such as Japanese honeysuckle, sumac, blackberry, sassafras, persimmon, and others are present on the prairie in greater density than is optimal.

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